



# promotional event ideas

## Promotional Event Ideas

**National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** events each September, no matter how large or small, are imperative to promoting the benefits of treatment and recovery from substance use disorders year round. Events help communities nationwide overcome societal stigmas that can affect people who are seeking treatment or are in recovery. By developing and promoting your organization's events, you are contributing to the lasting impact of this year's theme, ***“Join the Voices for Recovery: Build a Stronger, Healthier Community.”***

By encouraging people in your area to come forward to fight the stigma and discrimination that surround substance use disorders, you will undoubtedly leave an important impression on your community. To inspire you as you plan events this year, see the following examples of events that have helped spread positive **Recovery Month** messages.

### Consider These Examples...

In 2005, the city of Los Angeles held its Annual Beacon House Block Party. The event, which included two days of music, entertainment, food, fellowship, and fun for the entire family, is considered the original clean and sober street festival. Approximately 2,000 to 3,000 people participated in arts, crafts, prizes, dancing, and games.

Though larger events like the Block Party can attract a great deal of attention and media coverage, moderately sized programs can be just as effective in promoting the importance of community support for recovery. The first annual “Recovery Walk” on the island of Oahu in Hawaii generated support from over 300 people and the Lieutenant Governor. The event is slated to occur in upcoming **Recovery Month** celebrations.

Even low-key word-of-mouth events can have a great impact. Events on the smaller scale can include forums in local churches or religious gatherings. One such example is a September 2005 **Recovery Month** celebration in Albany, NY. This event included an afternoon of speakers, an art show, and musical renderings reflecting on the impact of substance use disorders on the community. Open to the public, the event was representative of numerous smaller events across the country that brought in around 50 people.

For additional event ideas, please visit the **Recovery Month** Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov) to review events held in previous years. Click on the years posted and select “Community Events.”

### Celebrate Recovery...

Hundreds of successful **Recovery Month** events nationwide, from professional sporting events to “town hall” meetings, have raised awareness of the importance of treatment for and recovery from substance use disorders.

As part of the 17<sup>th</sup> annual **Recovery Month** festivities this year, community members are encouraged to work together to raise support for recovery. By educating people about how stigma and discrimination can affect individuals' and families' progress in recovery, you can help dispel myths that make it difficult to access treatment and find recovery support.

This year's **Recovery Month** calls attention to:

- Educating community members about substance use disorders, treatment, and the effectiveness of recovery
- Celebrating people in recovery who are reclaiming their lives within the community
- Overcoming personal and societal stigmas and discrimination in accessing treatment services
- Addressing the fear of being fired or discriminated against if a history of having a substance use disorder becomes known
- Surmounting obstacles people and their families face when seeking substance use disorder treatment or when they are in recovery

The **Recovery Month** 2006 theme, ***“Join the Voices for Recovery: Build a Stronger, Healthier Community,”*** reinforces these messages through one cohesive campaign.

By planning community forums, media events, and other promotional activities, you can help spread these messages in your community. The following tips can help you maximize the effectiveness of your events and change societal attitudes by showcasing the faces and voices of people with substance use disorders and in recovery.

## Hold Community Forums...

A community forum is an excellent method to raise awareness about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery in your area. A forum features a panel of community leaders who discuss specific issues. A well-rounded panel may include:

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| ▪ People in recovery   | ▪ Members of community-based organizations and the faith community involved in recovery issues |
| ▪ Public officials and civic leaders   |  |
| ▪ Local treatment providers  | ▪ Health care providers  |
| ▪ Local providers or support programs for children of parents with substance use disorders | ▪ Educators and student assistance providers   |
| ▪ Media  | ▪ Labor groups   |
|  | ▪ Justice system   |

When hosting a community forum, enlist an experienced and well-informed moderator, such as a news anchor, professor, recovery counselor, or other respected community member. A good moderator will help set a positive tone for the event and keep the discussion moving forward.

Forums have enormous potential to unite people with substance use disorders, people in recovery, and strong allies. They can showcase a partnership between the local and state avenues responsible for the many aspects of the issue, such as helping those in need obtain access to treatment, addressing substance use disorders with the same attention as other treatable conditions, providing supportive education for the children of people with substance use disorders, and addressing the stigma associated with these disorders.

Consider organizing your activities in partnership with other heavily publicized events already taking place, such as a local festival, neighborhood gathering, or government event. Partnering with a government forum or legislator can attract media attention and achieve support for policies and funding initiatives. It will also provide you with an accessible venue within a state or local legislative body.

### **Invite Media...**

Media coverage can help you expand your activities to a wider audience. In addition to inviting newspaper reporters to write about your event, you can welcome local broadcast outlets to the occasion, which may make it possible to air your activities in their entirety, either live or taped. Consider Web casting by streaming your event on the Internet through your organization's Web site. This is an excellent way to promote your message to people unable to attend the event.

Inviting local media to attend a **Recovery Month** event can lead to media coverage about the importance of treating substance use disorders and the benefits of recovery. Successful media events usually contain two critical elements that draw attention: a focus on an exceptional newsworthy activity and the involvement of prominent figures from the community.

Newsworthy activities include:

- An athletic event (such as a run/walk or tournament) to celebrate recovery
- The opening of a new treatment center
- A forum where community members can address concerns and learn from local officials and experts about recovery
- The announcement of a new or expanded support program for children affected by substance use disorders in the family

- The issuance of a proclamation by a local or state government official
- An award presentation honoring someone who has fought to overcome stigma and discrimination against those with substance use disorders
- A fundraising event attended by influential community members

To attract local media coverage, plan ahead to ensure that your event itself is newsworthy. Create a roster of prominent speakers and confirm that they have interesting contributions to make. Participants that may draw media attention could include a member of Congress, a state legislator, the mayor, the governor, city council members, community leaders, and notable citizens from your area who are in recovery, who were affected by a loved one's substance use disorder and received help, or who assist others in working toward recovery. Your event could begin with a person in recovery saying a few words to introduce the event or signaling the beginning of a race.

If someone in recovery is speaking at your event, that person can speak about his or her experiences without violating the “anonymity” clauses of traditional mutual support groups. Many of these groups encourage members to share their stories as long as their membership in that particular group is not disclosed. As part of your planning process, let speakers know in advance if media will be invited so they can observe anonymity traditions.

At your event, distribute materials to members of the media to provide them with comprehensive, accurate information about recovery, your event, and your organization that will help them fill out their stories. Samples of materials to distribute are included in this planning toolkit, along with tips for speaking with the media. Materials should include:

- A news release
- Speaker biographies and photos
- Fact sheets about the issue, **Recovery Month**, and your organization
- Proclamations that have been issued in observance of **Recovery Month**

Make sure to include contact information for a spokesperson in your organization who can respond to the media.

Follow up with the media at the conclusion of your event. Encourage the media to raise questions and interview the featured speakers. Additionally, in the following days, be sure to call reporters to ask if they need any further information, unless a reporter has asked not to be contacted afterward. Finally, be sure to send thank-you letters to the non-media attendees at your event.

## Plan Your Events in Advance...

- Select a specific topic for your event.
- Compile a list of participants and speakers. Provide confirmed speakers with an agenda and time limit for their remarks, and instruct them to keep their speeches brief. If possible, obtain copies of their remarks in advance to ensure that many perspectives are included and no topic is repeated.
- Have a back-up venue if your event is outdoors. If you plan a rain date, make sure all attendees, speakers, moderators, and media know when and where the event will occur should it need to be rescheduled.
- Speakers can be delayed, become sick, or have a last-minute scheduling conflict. Make sure to have a back-up speaker or a revised agenda.
- Arrange for speakers, moderators, and other participants to arrive at least a half hour early and provide them with a private space to prepare. If the media will be present, confirm that each speaker has a firm grasp of your organization's pre-determined talking points to ensure they focus on the event topic. You can refer to the tips for speaking with the media in this planning toolkit for talking points about **Recovery Month**.
- Avoid competing with other **Recovery Month** activities by coordinating the times and dates of your events with other organizations. Also, cross-check your events with others on the **Recovery Month** Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov) to find other events in your local area and nationwide. You also may cross-check the calendar of events listed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) at [www.ncadi.samhsa.gov/calendar](http://www.ncadi.samhsa.gov/calendar).
- Post your event information on the **Recovery Month** Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov) to increase exposure.
- Check all audiovisual equipment to be sure it is in the proper order, is set up correctly, and those in charge know how to use it.

## Remember These Tips...

- Select a location that is easily accessible to members of the media and accommodates people with special needs, such as a public park or building, or an open space at a treatment center. Ensure that your location can be easily identified and is visually appealing to maximize photo opportunities.

- Send local media (newspaper, radio, television, Internet, magazines) a media advisory in advance of the event, and fax or e-mail your news release the morning of the event. Templates for both documents are included in this planning toolkit. Many television affiliates have a calendar of local events that community members find valuable, so you can have your event details posted there in advance.
- Monitor media coverage by collecting news clips you received for future use. Before distributing any clips on your Web site or to members of your organization, double-check with the publication and the author to obtain their permission. Please send samples of your media materials and clips to SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) using the address included at the end of this section.

## Mobilize Your Community...

Consider the following ways to spread the **Recovery Month** message:

**Articles** – Write a short article that discusses the benefits of treating substance use disorders. Include a Web site or telephone number where people can get more information—or to locate a treatment center. Use this article as part of your media outreach for your **Recovery Month** events. For more tips on writing and disseminating articles for **Recovery Month**, please see the document titled “Writing and Submitting an Op-Ed” in the “Media Outreach” section of this planning toolkit.

**Athletic Activities** – Get involved in local sports at the high school or college level. Work with schools, teams, and coaches to educate students about the dangers of steroids and other illegal—or legal—performance-enhancing substances. Some **Recovery Month** activities have been staged at amateur, semi-professional, or professional sporting events. Coordinate a walk/run, marathon, sports tournament, or similar event that encourages healthy lifestyles.

**Banners/Ads** – Place banners or advertisements promoting September as **Recovery Month** in your community's most visible areas, such as busy parks and intersections, on outdoor billboards, and on public transportation. You can also add an electronic image to your organization's Web site by downloading a banner from the **Recovery Month** Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov).

**Business and Volunteer Organization Distribution Channels** – You can capitalize on local organizations' existing channels for communicating with the general public by placing ads about your event in an organization's newsletter, church bulletin, or on bulletin boards of local stores and restaurants. Ask local businesses to display banners in prominent areas seen by the general public or to post notices on their Web sites.

**Exhibit Booths** – Set up a booth at a local hospital, community center, festival, health fair, or wellness event to disseminate pamphlets about effective treatment options and related subjects.

**Health Fairs** – Coordinate with other organizations to sponsor a health fair that addresses multiple health issues. Booths for local treatment centers, mutual support groups, and other mental health organizations can offer information about how they assist members of your community. Encourage families and children to attend the fair by offering health-related games, activities, and giveaways. Include information for children living with a family member with a substance use disorder, as well as information for clergy and other groups who can offer support. SAMHSA's NCADI has many helpful hand-out materials for these types of events. To order materials, call 800-729-6686 or visit the Web site at [www.ncadi.samhsa.gov](http://www.ncadi.samhsa.gov).

**High School Assemblies** – Coordinate with principals and school counselors at local high schools to organize assemblies that discuss substance use disorders, warning signs, the difficulties of living with a person with these disorders, and the hope and effectiveness of treatment. Educate them about how recovery can restore the health of the individual, family, friends, and the community. Tell them about the effective treatment options specifically designed for youth and about support programs for youth living with family members with substance use disorders. Invite youth in recovery to share personal anecdotes at assemblies, but first consult each school and district's guidelines regarding the sharing of sensitive and personal information by the students and obtain parent and/or guardian consent if the youth is a minor.

**High School or Local College Essay Contest** – Work with social workers, advisors, or counselors to have students submit essays about the impact of recovery on their lives, either through their own experience or the experience of a person close to them. Establish criteria for judging the entries and reward winners with a scholarship to help further their education.

**Media Sponsorships** – Ask local media outlets to sponsor your **Recovery Month** event by featuring their logo on your promotional materials. A media sponsorship enhances the credibility of your event by showing local support and can also help increase media coverage. Usually, only one media outlet will sponsor your event, but this will raise the profile of your program and will make it more possible for other outlets to cover the event.

**Radio Outreach** – Coordinate with a local radio DJ, public affairs director, or station manager to promote your **Recovery Month** event and mention key messages about your organization on the air. Radio is an important and powerful tool because most stations appeal to targeted audiences. By marketing your event to a specific population, you are taking advantage of a great opportunity to interest different groups in your event.

**Radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs)** – Send the live-read PSA scripts in this planning toolkit to your local radio stations to promote **Recovery Month** and substance use disorder treatment. You can also order recorded radio PSAs to disseminate to local radio outlets by e-mailing [media@health.org](mailto:media@health.org) or calling 240-747-4816.

**Recovery Weekend** – Reach out to faith leaders and clergy for a “Recovery Weekend.” This is an opportunity for religious leaders of all denominations to make recovery part of their sermons/homilies. Discuss the importance of early intervention, treatment, and recovery and how it can impact individuals, family members, the religious organization, and the entire community. Faith leaders can help their congregations better understand substance use disorders and dispel many myths associated with recovery. They can make hand-out materials available for congregants in need of help. Invite clergy in recovery to share their stories, if possible.

**Workplace Partnerships** – Urge local employers to promote **Recovery Month** to their employees. Ask them to display **Recovery Month** posters in high-traffic areas. Employers can host seminars that discuss what programs their company offers to assist those in need of treatment for substance use disorders and their family members.

Make sure that for all planned activities, your materials include phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and Web sites people can contact regarding treatment programs.

You are encouraged to share your plans and activities for *Recovery Month* 2006 with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), your colleagues, and the general public by posting them on the official *Recovery Month* Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov). By sharing creative executions and activities, you are helping to generate momentum, thereby furthering effective outreach that will touch the lives of millions of people.

To share your outreach efforts and community success stories during *Recovery Month*, please complete the Customer Satisfaction Form in this planning toolkit. Instructions are included on the form.

Please send samples of your organization’s *Recovery Month* promotional materials to: Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs, SAMHSA’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1 Choke Cherry Road, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Rockville, MD 20857.

Sample *Recovery Month* materials are available electronically on the CD-ROM in this planning toolkit. For additional *Recovery Month* materials, visit the *Recovery Month* Web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov) or call 1-800-662-HELP. For additional information about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery, please visit SAMHSA’s Web site at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).